

**SOME ACCOUNT OF MY
INTERCOURSE WITH
MADAME BLAVATSKY
FROM 1872 TO 1884**

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Some Account of My Intercourse with Madame Blavatsky from 1872 to 1884 by E. Coulomb

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E. COULOMB

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PREFACE.

THE following pamphlet has originated in the unscrupulous attacks which have been made upon my character since the publication of the "Blavatsky Correspondence" in the *Madras Christian College Magazine*.

I and my husband have been represented by Dr. Hartmann and others as untrustworthy adventurers, living upon the kindness of Madame Blavatsky while plotting against her, and while even forging her signature to false documents. We have been represented as 'menials' 'servants' (servants are not usually addressed by their mistress as "Mes Enfants" !), and every device of falsehood and misrepresentation has been used to discredit testimony that they know to be true.

I state in the following pages the truth, and only the truth, respecting my association with Madame B. But I do not state the whole truth, nor shall I do this, unless I am provoked to it. Madame Blavatsky alone will know what I keep back (excepting indeed the Editor of the *Christian College Magazine*, who has all my documents in his possession)—and if she

has left in her any spark of generous feeling, she will be thankful to me for sparing her. I have *not* forged her name, I have *not* 'traced genuine letters' and so made interpolations; I have *not* rifled her desk, or obtained any document I have in a dishonourable way—and Madame Blavatsky *knows well* that I have not done these things. But I hope the impartial public will only believe these things when they are proved. I hope Madame Blavatsky will prosecute me—I shall not run away. But I do not think she will, for she knows how much would then be revealed, and how trumpery her professions would turn out to be! She to take the *rôle* of injured innocence indeed! It is very clever, but it will not do inside a Court of Justice.

I cannot write books as well as Madame Blavatsky, so you must please excuse all faults and errors. I speak the truth, and say only what I know and can prove—that is the only merit I claim.

E. COULOMB.

ST. THOME, MADRAS,

November 29th, 1884.

SOME ACCOUNT OF MY ASSOCIATION WITH MADAME BLAVATSKY

FROM 1872 TO 1884.

IN the year 1872 one day as I was walking through the street called "Sekke el Ghamma el harmar"—"the street of the red mosque"—in Cairo, Egypt, I was roused from my pensive mood by something that brushed by me very swiftly. I looked up and saw a lady. "Who is that lady?" I asked a passer-by. "She is that Russian Spiritist who calls the dead and makes them answer your questions." This news was to me tidings of great joy, as I was just mourning for the death of my dear and only brother, whom I had recently lost. The idea of being able to hear his voice was for me heavenly delight. I was told that if I asked the Secretary of her Spiritualistic Society to introduce me to her he would do so (he was a Greek gentleman of my acquaintance). I was introduced, and found her very interesting and very clever. My first essay at the spirits was not successful; I neither saw nor heard anything but a few raps. Having shown my disappointment to the Secretary of the Society, I was told that the spirits did not like to appear in a room which had not been purified and not exclusively used for the purpose, but if I would return in a few days I would see wonders, as they were preparing a closet where nothing else but seances was to be done. I went to see the closet, and saw that it was lined with red cloth, all over the four sides and also the ceiling, with a space between the wall and the cloth of about three inches. I was so ignorant of these things at the time that I formed no malicious idea of it. I called again when the closet was ready, but what was my surprise when, instead of finding the kind spirits there to answer our questions, I found a room full of people, *all alive*, and using most offensive language towards the founder of the Society, saying that she had taken their money and had left them only with this, pointing at the space between the wall and the cloth, where several pieces of twine were still hanging which had served to pull through the ceiling a long glove stuffed with cotton, which was to represent the materialized hand and arm of some spirit. I went away, leaving the crowd as red as

fire, ready to knock her down when she came back. Later on I met her again, and I asked her how she came to do such a thing; to which she answered that it was Madame Sebire's doings (this was a lady who lived with Madame Blavatsky), so I let this matter drop. I saw that she looked very unhappy. I called on her the next day, and on hearing that she was really in want I gave her pecuniary help, and continued doing so for some time. As she could not repay me, she granted me receipts, which I left in my boxes in Egypt when I came away. Our acquaintance continued all the while she remained in the country.

This money was lent *cash*, no bill, no account, nothing but cash. To my knowledge Madame Blavatsky while in Cairo never lived in an hotel. I have known her in three different apartments. The first was in "Sekke el Ghamma el harmar," the second at "Abdeen," and the third at "Kantara el dick." In "Abdeen" she had opened her apartment to the public, who went there to consult her spirits, and where the *fiasco* of the materialized hand and arm took place as I have already said, and this in the year 1872.

She left Cairo for Russia, and I did not hear anything more about her until I traced her name in an article reproduced from an American newspaper, in which I learned that she had started a Society of a new kind: this was not a Spiritualistic Society, but a Theosophical one. I would have never troubled my mind about her, nor the money I had lent her, had not necessity compelled me to do so. At the time that Madame Blavatsky was in Cairo I was not married. I married a year after, and almost immediately we lost our fortune. Being by this unfortunate fact reduced to real poverty, we left Egypt and came to India, but good luck never came near us. We arrived in Calcutta in 1874, and found ourselves as comfortable as those who, after soaring in space for hundreds of miles in a balloon, find themselves dropped in the middle of the ocean.

Being strangers in this town, we had a good deal of trouble to find occupation, but finally did. I was employed in a school from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M., and in the spare hours I used to give private lessons, both in French and Italian, to several ladies belonging to the *elite* of the society there. I also had the honour of giving lessons in Italian to Lady Temple, wife of Sir Richard Temple, late Governor of Bombay, and if I were at liberty to print some of the letters which I have, I

could show how very kindly I was treated by this lady.— Her deference, her leniency, her goodness and generosity to me, shall for ever be engraved in my heart. As my husband was not acquainted with the English language at that time he could not obtain employment, but he tried to make some discovery in decimal reductions in which he succeeded; this is mentioned in one of Col. Olcott's letters published in the *Madras Christian College Magazine*, page 294. Now, having had to work so hard in a climate to which I was not accustomed, my health broke down, and the doctor said I must go for a change of air in some sanatorium. Although we had managed to put by a good bit of money, yet I felt reluctant at having to spend it and again remain without means. So, having had an offer to go and meet a lady at Ceylon who was coming from Europe and accompany her back to Calcutta, where her husband held a high office, I sailed for Ceylon and arrived at Galle. As I had to wait there for the arrival of the steamer, I put up at a very quiet hotel known as the Hotel de l'Univers, which was kept by an old French lady. I was very sick indeed, and this lady showed me every kindness, and I took a liking to her. Now, as the gentleman whose wife I was going to meet was paying all my expenses first class, the old dame of the hotel thought I was very rich, and as she wanted to give up business, she offered to sell the place to me. I immediately told her that I could not buy it, because I did not possess the sum which she was asking for it. The lady for whom I had come arrived and we started for Calcutta. On my arrival there I found that most of my pupils were preparing to leave for Europe, this being the time in which all fashionable people left for the hills or went home. This being the case, the number of lessons was very much reduced. The old French lady of Galle offered again to sell her hotel to us. One letter followed another, and finally she offered that we should take it and pay for it from the profit it yielded. We knew little or nothing about her, no more than what I have said, but we had no reason to think that she was getting us in the sack. We accepted this offer, collected our funds, sold part of our furniture, shipped the rest, and left Calcutta for Galle. Our agreement with this lady was that we should pay 50,000 francs (20,000 rupees) for furniture and good-will; we made a contract through a public notary and began to work, but soon found that the hotel was worth nothing. We remained there a few months, and then gave it back to her on amicable terms, and

some time after, she having failed, the hotel was sold for, I believe, 2,000 rupees.

Now we were in a nice predicament,—no more friends, no more home, no more means to go back. What could be done? While in this dilemma a very kind native gentleman came forward and offered us his assistance to open another hotel opposite the French office. We did so, and would have done a good business if there had not been so many hotels for such a small place as Galle. The Oriental was for the first-class purses, and all the others had to fight for a bonè; and we had to give it up for this reason, and more especially because the license for hotels, which had been up to that year only 100 rupees, was increased to 250 rupees. This great difference to people of small means was simply ruinous.

Then from this place we went up into the country, hoping to be able to grow some European vegetables, with which Galle was thoroughly unprovided; but the soil being barren and stony, nothing would grow. So now we had exhausted all ways of obtaining a quiet livelihood, and were in this unhappy position when we read in the *Ceylon Times* that Madame Blavatsky, accompanied by an American Colonel and an English gentleman and a lady, had arrived in Bombay and had founded a Theosophical Society there. After this explanation my readers will easily understand with what joy I read of the arrival of Madame Blavatsky in India. I really considered it a God-send, and took it as such. The first thing I did was to sit down and write a long letter to Madame Blavatsky, in which I spoke to her of our old acquaintance, and gave her an idea of what had occurred to me since she left Cairo. She answered in a very friendly letter, relating all her adventures from that time. I must make the story short, though the letter is very long, and contains some things which I will not expose.

She said that she lived in Odessa one year, and thence went to India, where she remained for over eight months, then returning by Odessa to Europe, went to Paris and from there proceeded to America. "My lodge in India," she says, "of which I may have spoken to you, had decided that as the Society established by myself and old Sebire was a failure, I had to go to America and establish one on a larger scale." (I know nothing about her lodge in India; nor did she ever mention it to me; all I can affirm is that the Society she tried to establish in Egypt was nothing else

but a Spiritualistic Society.) "This, as you see, is far from being a failure." She concludes her letter with speaking of her "*Isis Unveiled*" and the Society she had founded, and of its progress, giving the names of some of the members of it, such as Mr. Wyld, Mr. Crookes, Mr. Wallace and other Fellows of the Royal Society, who had joined it, and of Mr. Herbert Spencer and Mr. Varley, who, she says, had applied also. This was all very fine, but did not open my way to get out of trouble. So sometime after I wrote to her again, and explained to her clearly our situation, and asked her to send us some money. To this letter she answered as follows: That she was as poor as a church-rat, and had incurred many expenses in travelling, building a library, and starting a journal, etc., etc. She goes on to say that the whole of her income from a sum of money (or rather the remainder of it) left to her by her father gives her something not exceeding 100 rupees a month, and that with the exception of President Olcott, "who could be rich, if he is not," none of them are overflowing with money. "Knowing this we joined," she says, "our capital together, and placing it in New York in a secure house, derive from it each of us about 100 rupees monthly. This belongs to the community, money which none of us can touch, for it is for the expenses of the house, and it is not much, I can assure you." Then she goes on to say that her name as conducting the paper appears, to be sure! "but it is only a figure-head, as I am so well-known in Europe and America: but the property is not mine, nor the control. I sincerely think that it will be to your advantage in more ways than one to identify yourself as fellows. Now it so happens that President Olcott, who is the best of men, is a fanatic in matters upon the Theosophical Society. He will take off his skin for a fellow, but do nothing for an outsider."

Having thus been invited to join the Society, and hoping by this means to be able to settle down and get a quiet living, I immediately set to work to raise the money necessary for our journey from Galle (Ceylon) to Bombay. This took a very long time, and we were not able to leave before the 24th March, 1880, arriving at Bombay by a P. and O. steamer on the 28th of the same month, that is, after four days' sail. In the evening, as soon as we arrived, we landed, and, after having taken a room and our dinner in the hotel, we drove in a tram-cart up to the terminus of Girgaum,